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RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0207  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0238  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 0394  
RUEHBA/AMCONSUL PERTH 0202  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000317

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SUBJECT: NATIONAL CENSUS AND VOTER REGISTRATION UPDATE

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 200

Classified By: Amb. Joseph LeBaron, Reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

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(C) Key Points  
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-- The census and voter registration drive, which began February 16 and was scheduled to end March 17, will be extended an additional 45 days, until April 30, to allow for additional registrations.

-- Ambassador's recent trip to northern Mauritania to meet with several regional census teams, and a recent observation mission by PolOff in the capital itself, has conveyed strong USG interest in the census and voter registration drive.

-- The transitional government has made a very good effort to inform Mauritians throughout the country about the census, including commissioning a special song to get Mauritians to participate in the census and voter registration drive. Ambassador heard the song several times on national radio during his four-day trip.

-- For those who do apply for ID cards, they usually receive them within three to four days, thanks to a well-organized and efficient ID card production center.

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(C) Comments  
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-- While accusations of irregularities persist, the census officials whom Ambassador and PolOff talked to demonstrated an organized strategy for the census and voter registration effort.

-- It is too early, however, to project the success of that effort.

End Key Points and Comments.

1. (U) Ambassador met with four census teams during a four-day swing through northern Mauritania March 13-16, visiting provincial capitals and several major towns and large villages. Concurrently, PolOff participated in two days of observations in the Nouakchott and Brakna regions March 13-14 organized by the local UN Secretariat for

Electoral Assistance. Ambassador and PolOff separately talked to census takers and examined voter registration lists. PolOff witnessed voter registrations and toured the National ID production center. The census, which will be used to create a national voters list, began February 16 and was scheduled to end March 17, but was extended 45 days to allow for additional registrations. The door-to-door census canvassing will now end March 31, with citizens able to continue registering at regional registration centers until April 30.

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PUBLIC AWARENESS AND OUTREACH  
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12. (C) On the whole, the transitional government appears to be making a strong effort to conduct an accurate census of eligible Mauritanian voters. Nevertheless, some Mauritians outside the capital Nouakchott appear to be poorly informed about the census and coming elections, even though a national voter education drive has been launched by the transitional government, which includes a specially-written song to encourage citizen participation. The government is also using cell phone text messages and the official newspaper to spread the word.

13. (C) Nevertheless, a significant number of citizens outside of Nouakchott appear to be unaware of how to get a National ID card -- required for registration. When census takers arrived to register these citizens, they had to explain to them the process for applying for an ID card, and how they could later register for the census. Many citizens complained that they lacked sufficient time to apply for the

NOUAKCHOTT 00000317 002 OF 002

ID cards and register before the census' scheduled March 17 close. The six week extension to the census will provide sufficient time for these citizens to apply for a card and register, but will likely not help many of the other citizens without ID cards that the census workers have not yet reached.

14. (C) While Nouakchott residents were better informed than rural residents on how to obtain ID cards, both groups lacked information on the coming elections, including the Constitutional Referendum scheduled for June 24. Residents did not know when elections were scheduled to occur or even how many were planned.

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LOCAL AREAS TAKING THE INITIATIVE  
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15. (C) While the transitional government has taken only preliminary -- and unfocussed -- steps towards informing the public, certain regions have taken the initiative and have begun implementing their own outreach strategies. The regional electoral commission in the Dar Naim commune of Nouakchott has produced and distributed informational flyers explaining the census process and the steps to request a National ID card, while the Wali -- government appointed governor -- in the southern Brakna region has held dozens of meetings with residents, Imams and political parties to answer questions and develop public outreach campaigns.

16. (C) Additional local initiative has been demonstrated by regions which have used mobile teams to provide National ID cards in remote areas where citizens might otherwise not be able to reach the permanent ID card application offices located in the main cities. Such a mobile team has been used in the Brakna region to provide hundreds of ID cards to residents in remote areas.

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PROVIDING 200,000 NATIONAL ID CARDS  
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¶7. (C) Though the government has struggled to inform the public about National ID cards, they have succeeded in quickly providing such cards once requests are received. The National ID card production center is well-organized and efficient. With a maximum capacity of 10,500 cards issued daily, the center averages a turnaround of three to four days from the time the citizen submits a request to the time they receive their card. The center employs redundant data entry standards to eliminate entry error, and uses software to identify and eliminate multiple ID card requests.

¶8. (C) While we continue to hear accusations of discrimination in the registration of Afro-Mauritanians and the mass movement of citizens to register in strategic areas away from their homes, PolOff saw no evidence of such acts during his observations. However, it is unlikely that such acts would occur with embassy or UN observers present.  
LeBaron